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A VISIT TO THE



“OLD NORTH CHURCH,”



BOSTON, MASS.



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PREFACE.

IN this short story of the historical old church I have confined myself to facts from the records and items gathered by me during the twenty-three years I have been connected with the church. Some portion has been taken (by consent) from the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary sermon delivered by the Rev. Henry Burroughs, D.D., in 1873.

It is hoped that the endeavor to fill a long-felt want among the many visitors to the church will be successful, and that the church may be benefited thereby.

CHARLES DOWNER,

Sexton.





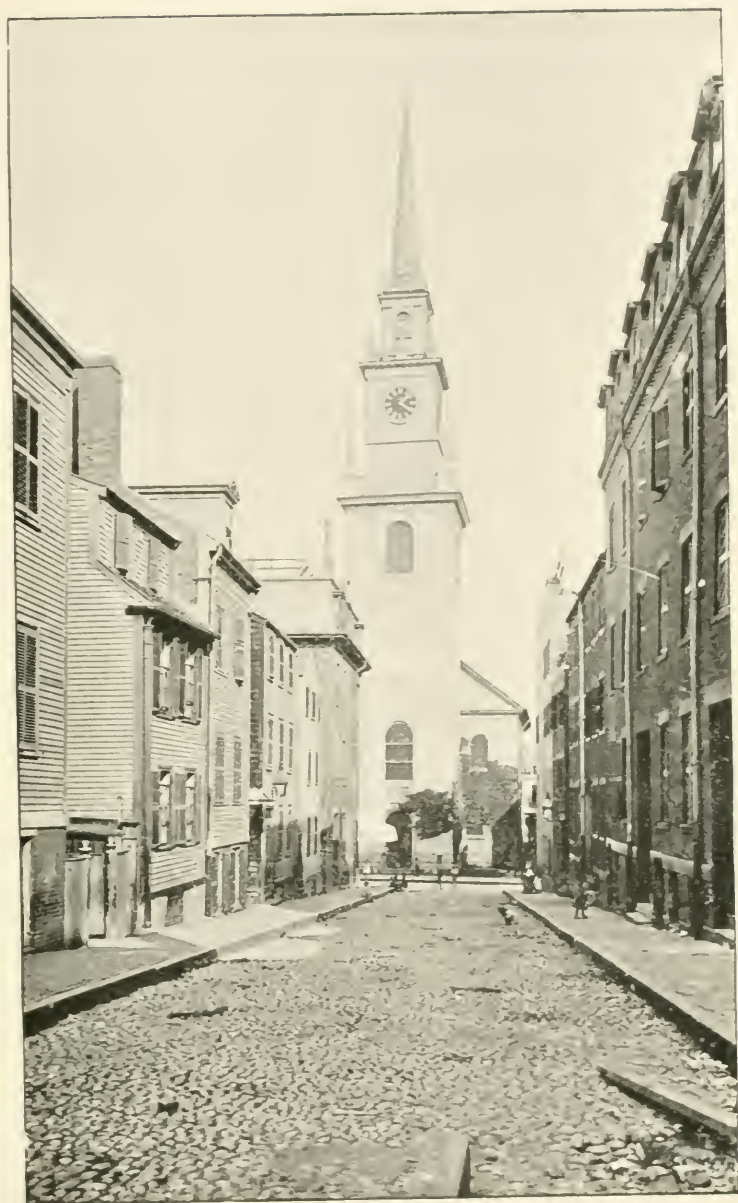
CHRIST CHURCH.

CHRIST CHURCH, or better known as "The Old North Church," is situated on Salem Street, in the extreme north end of the city, and near the summit of Copp's Hill, one of the ancient landmarks of Boston. It was built in the year 1723, the corner-stone being laid by the Rev. Samuel Myles, rector of King's Chapel, on the fifteenth day of April of that year, with the following words: "May the gates of hell never prevail against it." It was opened for public services on Dec. 29, the opening sermon being preached by the Rev. Timothy Cutler, D.D., the first rector, taking for his text the seventh verse of the fifty-sixth chapter of Isaiah: "For mine house shall be called a house of prayer for all people." The church was not quite completed at that time, there being some plastering and other minor work to be finished.

The church is a substantial brick structure seventy-five feet long, fifty feet wide, and thirty-five feet high, with walls two and one-half feet thick. The tower is twenty-four feet square, eighty-five feet high, the walls of which are three and one-half feet thick. Above the brick-work

is a tower of wood, built in sections, and surmounted with a spire, the extreme height of the whole being one hundred and seventy-five feet. It is said to be a very pleasing piece of architecture, the design of which is attributed to that great church architect, Sir Christopher Wren. It has stood here as an unerring landmark to the incoming mariner these many years. The spire was blown down in 1804 by a great gale, and was rebuilt in 1807. In 1848 it was taken down, repaired, and replaced in position : all of which was considered a great undertaking that was completed without accident.





THE BELLS.

THIS tower contains the first peal of (8) bells brought to this country. They were purchased by subscription, costing £560. The combined weight is 6,432 pounds, smallest weighing 620 and largest 1,545 pounds. Each bell has an inscription around the crown telling its own story.

No. 1. "This peal of 8 bells is the gift of a number of generous persons to Christ Church in Boston, New England. Anno 1744. A.R."

No. 2. "This church was founded in the year 1723, Rev. Timothy Cutler the first Rector. Anno 1744. A.R."

No. 3. "We are the first ring of bells cast for ye British Empire in North America. Anno 1744. A.R."

No. 4. "God preserve the Church of England. Anno 1744. A.R."

No. 5. "William Shirley, Esq., Governor of Massachusetts Bay in New England. Anno 1744. A.R."

No. 6. "The subscriptions for these bells were begun by John Hammock and Robert Temple, Church Wardens, 1743, and completed by Robert Jenkins and Jno. Gould, Church Wardens, 1744. A.R."

No. 7. "Since generosity has opened our mouths our tongues shall ring aloud its praise. 1744. A.R."

No. 8. "Abel Rudhall of Gloucester cast us all in England. Anno 1744."

They are now considered the best and sweetest toned bells in the country. Their clear notes are always heard at Christmas-tide ringing out the "glad tidings of great joy to all people"; on Sundays and other holy-days summoning the worshippers to church; at weddings and on national holidays sending forth their joyful songs; also tolling solemn notes at the funerals of departed loved ones, now, as since their first effort in 1744.

The Signal Lights.

The 18th of April, 1775, is a memorable day in our annals, connecting the history of this church with that of the nation. On that evening the sexton, Robert Newman, sat quietly in his house on Salem Street awaiting the arrival of his friend, Capt. Thomas Barnard, who was watching the movements of the regulars; while on the other side of the river Paul Revere watched and waited for the signals that notified him of their route.

"If the British march
By land or sea from the town to-night,
Hang a lantern aloft in the belfry arch
Of the North Church tower as a signal light:
One if by land, and two if by sea,

And I on the opposite shore will be
Ready to ride and give the alarm
Through every Middlesex village and farm,
For the country folk to be up and to arm!"

Mr. Newman, taking down the church keys, went out, and meeting his friend, who apprises him of the news, he unlocks the church door, and goes

"Up the wooden stairs with stealthy tread,
To the belfry chamber overhead;
And startled the pigeons from their perch
On the sombre rafters that round him made

Masses of moving shapes and shade—
Up the light ladder, slender and tall,
To the highest window in the wall!"

Paul Revere and his patriot friends from the water-side in Charlestown

"Watched with eager search
The belfry tower of the old North Church,
As it rose above the graves on the hill,
Lonely and spectral and sombre and still;
And lo! as he looks on the belfry's height,

A glimmer, and then a gleam of light!
He springs to the saddle; the bridle he turns;
But lingers and gazes, till full on his sight
A second lamp in the belfry burns!"

After completing his momentous task Mr. Newman quickly descends, jumps out of a back window, and unobserved enters his house and retires to bed, only to be soon after brought forth under arrest. No charges being proven against him he was set at liberty.

To commemorate this historical event, the City of Boston caused a tablet to be placed on the tower of the church Oct. 17. 1878. containing the following inscription:

THE SIGNAL LANTERNS OF
PAUL REVERE
DISPLAYED IN THE STEEPLE OF THIS CHURCH
APRIL 18TH 1775
WARNED THE COUNTRY OF THE MARCH
OF THE BRITISH TROOPS TO
LEXINGTON AND CONCORD



THE INTERIOR.

ON entering the church the appropriateness of the architectural surroundings is suggestive — the high galleries, arched ceiling, fluted columns, large windows with small panes of glass, and its straight-line architecture.

The ancient square pews were taken out in 1806 and the present long, slip pews substituted; but the original doors, hung with large wrought-iron hinges, are retained at the present time.

The deep, receding chancel, with striking appearance, is unchanged. In the centre, immediately over the altar, is a painting representing the Last Supper, the work of a Mr. Penniman. The picture has been in its present position over one hundred years. The painting over the chancel, representing the descent of the Holy Spirit — a dove and three cherubs — is the work of a Mr. Johnson. It has been in position over a century. Below it are the words, "This is none other than the House of God and this is the Gate of Heaven." The oaken table which is used as an altar has been in use a long time, and is supposed to be the original.



Looking towards the front of the church stands the organ. It was purchased and erected in its present position in 1759. The builder was Thomas Johnson. In 1884 it was subjected to some repairs, whereby the old pipes were taken out and new ones substituted. With the exception of the two end rows of pipes, the original case remains.

The four statuettes in front of the organ were presented to the church by Captain Grushea, commander of the privateer "Queen of Hungary," who captured them from a French vessel during the French war in 1746; also two glass chandeliers that are not now in existence. They were intended for a Spanish church in the settlements on the St. Lawrence River. The statuettes are excellent specimens of Spanish art, carved from wood of fine quality.

The clock in front of the gallery has been in its present position since 1749. and was made by Mr. Avery, who presented it to the church. It is a good time-keeper at the present time, and its loud tick, tick was spoken of by Rev. Mr. Croswell, a former rector, who used the room adjoining the gallery as a sleeping apartment, in the following words :

"To know that in the lofty room
I was the only living guest—
The ticking of yon ancient clock,
That marks the solemn tread of time,
Against my heart-strings seems to knock."

The gallery on each side of the organ originally extended across that end of the church, in the centre of which was a window. The wall was painted with drapery curtains, the effect of which is quite pleasing. When the organ was put in it was found necessary to divide it. It was formerly set apart for the colored servants, and later for the children of the Sunday-school. The entrance was by a flight of stairs (now closed) leading from the tower.



THE COMMUNION SERVICE.

THE Communion Service consists of thirteen pieces, which were presented to the Society by the following persons : One small chalice, by Capt. Thomas Tudor, 1724 ; two of the large flagons, by the congregation, and are inscribed as belonging to Christ Church, 1729 ; the large paten, by Leonard Vassall, Esq., 1730, and is so inscribed, with the family coat of arms ; the large baptism bowl, by Arthur Savage, Esq., 1732 ; the remaining two large flagons, the large chalice, the small paten or cover for chalice, and the large plate called a receiver, by King George II., and are inscribed, “The gift of His Majesty King George II to Christ Church at Boston in New England at the request of his Excellency Governor Belcher, 1733,” with the royal arms of England on each piece ; a large covered dish, by Hannah Smith, 1815, and an antique perforated spoon, inscribed, “Presented to Christ Church by H N Baxter Decr 25th 1833.” All the pieces are of a very plain pattern, in sterling silver, and very valuable.





THE BIBLE.

THE Bible was presented to the church by King George II., in 1733, together with five large Prayer Books. The Bible is a very large and valuable edition, printed by John Baskett at Oxford, England, in 1717. It is a copy of an edition quite celebrated on account of an error in the printing. In the title at the top of a page on which a portion of the twentieth chapter of St. Luke is printed, occur the following words: "The parable of the vinegar," instead of "The parable of the vineyard," on account of which error it was termed the "Vinegar Bible." All the Prayer Books, with the exception of one, have been altered by cutting out the morning and evening prayers, and substituting others with different wording. One has pieces of paper pasted over the prayers for King and Royal Family, with words written upon them to meet the necessary change: for the "Church of England" had become the "Protestant Episcopal Church of America." The engraving is from the portion containing the error.





THE BUST OF WASHINGTON.

AT the left of the chancel, in a niche made by the south-west window, is a bust representing George Washington, that was presented to the church in 1815 by Shubael Bell, Esq. It is said to be a very good representation of the "Father of Our Country," and reputed to have been made by a celebrated Italian artist. Some claim it as one of, or a copy of, Houdon's celebrated bust, but Miss Johnson, the Washington historian, thinks it the work of John Wright, the Quaker artist of Philadelphia, who made the first bust of Washington for the government. The records of the vestry that refer to that period having been lost, I am unable to give any authentic name of the artist. In conversation with the Rt. Rev. Bishop Coxe, of Western New York State, he said that when General Lafayette visited the church in 1826, while admiring it, was asked by the Rev. Father Brinley if that was a good likeness of General Washington. He very emphatically replied, while pointing to the bust: "Yes, that is my old friend and comrade, George Washington."





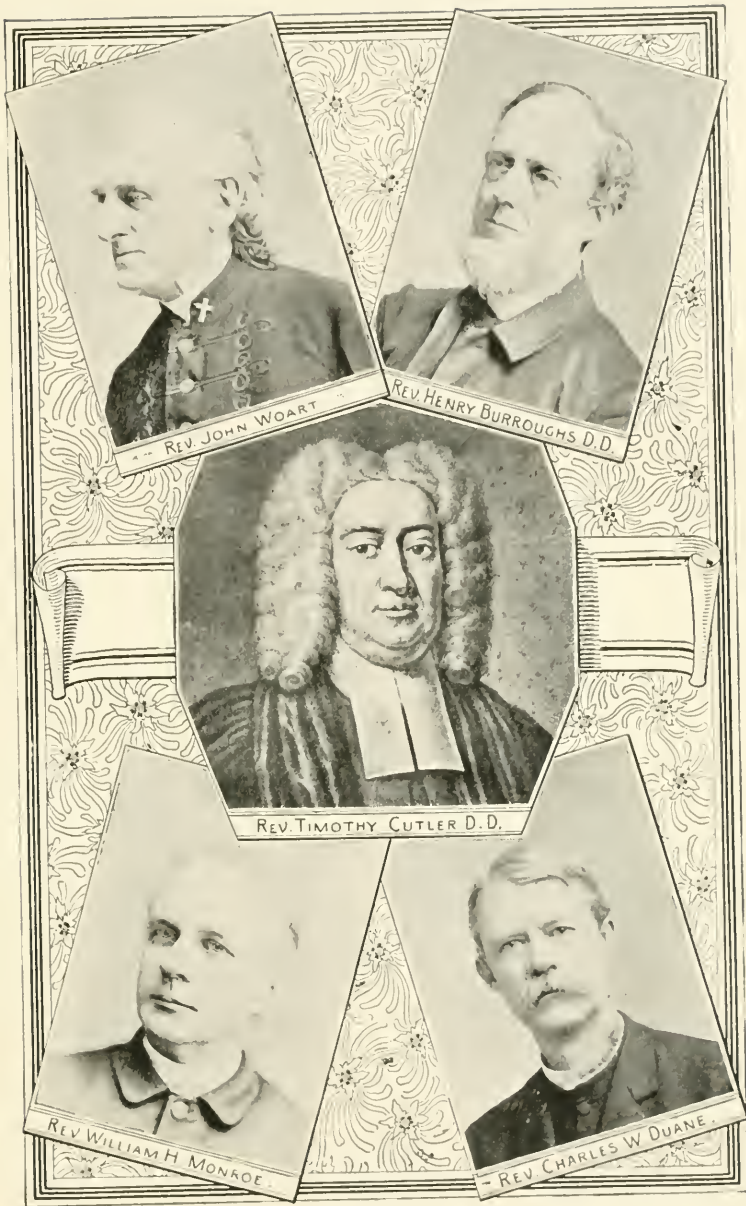


SUNDAY-SCHOOL.

ON June 14, 1815, the church organized the first Sunday-school known in this part of the world. It had 365 scholars in attendance on its first Sunday. An ancient roll of scholars, written in 1817, with its quaint names of streets, lanes, and alleys at Old North End, still hangs in the Sunday school room. In the list of former workers who have been connected with it occur the names of some celebrated ministers and laymen in their Master's vineyard, such as Rev. Dr. Eaton, Rev. Dr. Edson, Shubael Bell, and Joseph W. Ingraham, the last named having been superintendent for twenty years.

RECTORS.

Rev. TIMOTHY CUTLER, D.D.	1723 to 1765.
Rev. JAMES GREATON, Assistant (afterward Rector)	1759 to 1767.
Rev. MATHER BYLES, D.D. (the last to preach in the church previous to the Revolution)	1768 to 1775.
Rev. STEPHEN LEWIS	1778 to 1785.
Rev. WILLIAM MONTAGUE	1786 to 1792.
Rev. WILLIAM WALTER, D.D.	1792 to 1800.
Rev. SAMUEL HASKELL	1801 to 1803.
Rev. ASA EATON, D.D.	1803 to 1829.
Rev. WILLIAM CROSWELL	1829 to 1839.
Rev. JOHN WOART	1840 to 1852.
Rev. WILLIAM T. SMITHETT	1853 to 1860.
Rev. JOHN T. BURRELL	1861 to 1868.
Rev. HENRY BURROUGHS, D.D.	1868 to 1882.
Rev. WILLIAM H. MUNROE	1882 to 1892.
Rev. CHARLES W. DUANE, at present in charge	1893.



REV. JOHN WOART

REV. HENRY BURROUGHS D.D.

REV. TIMOTHY CUTLER D.D.

REV. WILLIAM H. MONROE

REV. CHARLES W. DUANE

WARDENS AND VESTRY.

1794.



Wardens.

THOMAS GILLES
ANTHONY DUBOIS

—

Vestrymen.

JOHN FRANKLIN
EDWARD WATSON
JOHN CLARK
CHARLES FRANKLIN
JOHN CLARK
GEORGE KIRK
NATHANIEL CLARK
ROBERT FRANKLIN



1803.



Wardens.

THOMAS HILL
FRANCIS S. LE CLERC

—

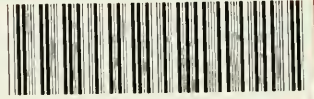
Vestrymen.

JOHN WYKE WATSON
JOHN DUBOIS
WILLIAM SANDY
CHARLES FRANKLIN
EDWARD H. SANDY





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